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UNCLAS GUATEMALA 000134

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DEPT PASS TO USAID FOR LAC/CAM KSIENKIEWICZ

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SURVIVORS FOUNDATION COMBATS VIOLENCE AGAINST
WOMEN IN GUATEMALA

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶1. (U) Summary: The Survivors Foundation, a local GOG-supported NGO that provides free legal assistance and psychological support to female victims of violence and abuse, attended to more than 6,000 victims and their family members in 2007. The foundation drove investigations that led to the prosecution and conviction of 30 individuals charged with murder of women. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On January 28, Human Rights Officer met with Norma Cruz, Director of Fundacion Sobrevivientes (Survivors Foundation), to discuss violence against women and the work of her organization in combating impunity. According to Cruz, 2,909 women were killed over the past seven years in Guatemala, including 525 women in 2007, half of them in Guatemala City. She estimated that 80 percent of the murders were connected to organized crime, narcotrafficking, and gang activity, while 20 percent were related to domestic disputes.

¶3. (SBU) Cruz asserted that organized crime cases were the most difficult to clarify due to the involvement of clandestine networks. She noted that narcotraffickers typically kill out of revenge, to mark their territory, or to settle outstanding debts. She observed that in contrast to other countries where gangs protect women, in Guatemala women are viewed as trophies: raping and killing a woman is sometimes part of the initiation for prospective gang members. The crueler the violence, the greater the respect accorded the gang member.

¶4. (U) In 2001, Cruz created the Survivors Foundation to provide support to victims of violence and to families of abused and murdered women, and to break the cycle of impunity. The organization attends to hundreds of women who seek justice and protection. The victims are referred by hospitals, the Attorney General's Office, and the National Civil Police (PNC). With an annual budget of Q2 million (USD 263,158) from the Guatemalan Congress and a staff of 35, including seven lawyers and five psychologists, the organization provides legal assistance, psychological attention, and accompaniment in legal proceedings.

¶5. (U) The foundation, which Cruz described as a microcosmic Attorney General's Office, tends to an average of 45 cases per day, seven days a week. The cases fall into three categories of violence: intrafamilial, sexual, and murder. In 2007, the organization attended to more than 6,000 victims and their family members, all of whom filed legal actions. It also helped convict and sentence 30 individuals charged with murder of women. It has attended to 15 underage trafficking victims, and is currently working on ten cases of trafficking in persons (three cases involving adolescents 14

to 21 years of age, and seven cases involving victims less than 14 years of age). It has coordinated closely with the PNC and the Attorney General's Office, as well as with the Embassies of Nicaragua, Honduras, and El Salvador.

16. (U) The Survivors Foundation has a maximum-security shelter, with armed security guards and surveillance cameras, in an undisclosed location to protect those who seek refuge. The shelter has space for 25 women, and allows a maximum stay of three months. In January, the shelter assisted 20 victims of violence and abuse.

17. (SBU) Cruz attributed the climate of impunity to a combination of the low priority the society and rule of law institutions place on resolving crimes against women, and the lack of resources in GOG institutions. She asserted that the PNC has weak operational capacity due to lack of training, QPNC has weak operational capacity due to lack of training, and that the witness protection program is not comprehensive.

The foundation is working with the GOG to seek ways to strengthen institutional capacity to end impunity.
Derham